Managing Curricular Innovation

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1 Introduction

> There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new order of things. (Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* 1513; cited in Rogers 1983: 1)

Language teaching professionals have built up a body of theoretical and practical knowledge since the 1980s that has resulted in the formulation of various innovative approaches to language teaching. What exactly does the phrase "innovative approaches to language teaching" mean? For some readers, this phrase may suggest various "designer" methods like the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, or Community Language Learning (see Blair 1982 or Richards and Rodgers 1986). This is not the concern here, since the examples in this book are all within the mainstream of second and foreign language pedagogy: notional-functional syllabuses, the process syllabus, the Natural Approach, and various kinds of task-based language teaching. Rather, the concern of this book is why some new ideas or practices spread while others do not. More concretely, why does a new textbook succeed in the public education system of one country while identical materials fail in another? What must program directors at universities, public schools, and private sector institutions do to persuade teachers to use new ways of teaching?

All language teaching professionals doubtless ask themselves such questions often. Yet, until recently, applied linguistics, the discipline that should provide language educators with the knowledge to answer such questions, has been noticeably silent on these issues. This silence is surprising, since understanding what determines the success or failure of new pedagogical ideas and practices is surely a crucial issue, especially for teacher educators.

This book aims to provide language teaching professionals with the knowledge – both theoretical and practical – needed to answer precisely these questions. More specifically, asking such questions – which focus primarily on issues of syllabus *implementation* rather than *design* – in-

volves adopting a "diffusion-of-innovations" perspective on understanding educational change. This perspective leads to other questions, about what change is, what attributes innovations should possess in order to be adopted, how different kinds of individuals react to innovations, and how various systemic factors – all sociocultural in nature – interact to affect the implemention of innovations.

Two assumptions undergird this book. First, given the ubiquitousness of change in education (Baldridge and Deal 1983), the study of how to effect educational change should be part of the basic intellectual preparation of all language teaching professionals – particularly of those individuals who possess or seek to obtain advanced graduate degrees in the field. Second, although curriculum development and teacher development are often treated as separate issues, they are in fact indivisible (Stenhouse 1975). Indeed, to summarize the message of this book in one sentence, the adoption of a diffusionist perspective on educational change involves addressing the short- and long-term professionalization of teachers, on whom real, long-lasting change in the classroom always depends.

This book is written from the point of view of an ESL program director; however, it is not ESL-specific. Whether we are talking about second or foreign language education, and whether we are Spanish, Russian, or Arabic specialists, the implementation of change in language education occurs within a systemic ecology that either promotes or inhibits innovation. In other words, cultural, economic, political, and other factors always mediate the possibility of change. Thus, whatever the language being taught, the problems of effecting change can be analyzed in terms of a common sociocultural perspective on change. This perspective is valid regardless of the contexts of implementation in which language teaching professionals operate.

This book addresses a broad spectrum of language specialists, especially those who are directly involved in language teaching and teacher education and training. Although all language teaching professionals have a stake in promoting educational change, the interests and motivations that different players bring to the task of implementing change vary tremendously. To address the needs and interests of this heterogeneous audience, the discussion is couched in both theoretical and practical terms.

In order to illustrate how innovation works, I rely heavily on the CATI project. This reliance may prompt some readers to ask, "What does this project have to do with me?" Any case study is potentially open to this criticism. If the package of *solutions* developed for the CATI project is not transferable to other institutions without considerable adaptation, nevertheless the *problems* that must be solved turn out to be strikingly similar across different sociocultural contexts.

Whether the locus of change is a school or university, and whether change occurs in an Australian, a Canadian, a Hungarian, an Indian, an Indonesian, a Japanese, or a U.S. context, the same problems occur again and again. This insight is supported by a number of case studies of educational change in language teaching (see Bailey 1992; Beretta 1990; Bottomley, Dalton and Corbel 1994; Brindley and Hood 1991; Duff and Early 1996; Henrichsen 1989; Markee 1994a,b, 1996; Prabhu 1987; Ranta et al. 1996; Rounds in press; Tomlinson 1990; Young 1992).

Thus, the rationale for providing a detailed description of a single project is that this illuminates the kinds of problems of implementation that all language teaching professionals must confront. Consequently, just as language teaching professionals learned a great deal about developing, implementing, and evaluating innovative projects from the Bangalore Project, so can important lessons about the management of educational change be learned from the CATI project, which, unlike the Bangalore Project, is still evolving.

Since this book addresses a broad audience, different readers will have different reasons for reading it. Thus, not everybody will want to read it in the same way. Readers equally interested in the theory and practice of educational innovation should read all three parts of this book linearly. However, readers who have different aims or preferences may read this book like a computer hypertext. That is, they may want to begin with the sections that interest them most and refer to other chapters as needed. For example, researchers using this book as a reference on educational innovation theory may concentrate on Parts I and III. On the other hand, teachers interested in the practical aspects of effecting educational change may focus on Part II. Similarly, readers who prefer a deductive to an inductive approach may read Chapter 3 before Chapter 2.

In order to facilitate nonlinear reading, I have cross-referenced discussions of thematically related material in different parts of the book through 167 "Text Links." For example, if I were to refer to the CATI project, the reader would be directed to a series of references through a parenthetical text citation: for example, (see Text Link 1). Thus, Text Link 1 refers readers to the preface and also to Text Links 93 and 159, which reference relevant text later in the book. This text can be located by looking for the target Text Link box and reading the paragraph in which it is located. Note that, in a few instances, some of the relevant text is located in the paragraph that immediately precedes or follows the paragraph in which the target Text Link box is embedded.

∞ Text Link 1
For more specific information pertaining to the CATI project, see the Preface and Text Link 93. Finally, see also Principle 1 and Text Link 159.

A diffusion-of-innovations perspective on curriculum work is a growth area in language teaching (see, for example, Alderson and Wall 1993; Allwright and Waters 1994; Bailey 1992; Beretta 1989, 1990, 1992a; Bottomley et al. 1994; Bowers 1987; Brindley and Hood 1991; Brumfit 1983; Burns and Brindley 1994; Burns and Hood 1995; Candlin 1984a,b; Cumming 1993; Henrichsen 1989; Holliday 1992a,b, 1994a,b, 1995a,b; Holliday and Cooke 1982; Kennedy 1982, 1987, 1988, 1994; Markee 1986a,b, 1993a,b, 1994a,b, 1996; Phillipson 1992; Savage 1996; Stoller 1992, 1994, 1995a,b; Wall and Alderson 1993; White 1987, 1988, 1993; White et al. 1991; Young, 1992). A much more comprehensive bibliography is available from the annotated bibliography of the Language in Development Forum, a World Wide Web site on the Internet. Despite the increasing numbers of publications, however, language teaching professionals are only beginning to discover innovation as an area of professional practice and academic study. Thus, critical caution is in order before wholeheartedly embracing a diffusionist perspective on language education.

If we are to avoid reinventing the wheel, we must realize that the heyday of the innovation movement in education occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was widespread optimism and belief in the ability to effect important changes in educational practice. Nowadays, educators are less optimistic (Fullan 1989, 1993; MacDonald 1991; Rudduck 1991). Language teaching professionals should also know what the limitations of innovation research are. For example, Everett Rogers, one of the leading scholars in this field, notes that diffusion research has been criticized for displaying (1) a pro-innovation bias, in that it has been assumed that such research was conducted only to help promote the adoption of innovations; (2) an inequity bias, in which the socioeconomic and other consequences associated with developing innovations have been ignored or downplayed; (3) an individual-blame bias, in which individuals (rather than the larger social system) tend to be blamed for failure; and (4) a lack of methodological rigor, as when researchers rely on the subjective recollections of informants instead of using objective observational procedures to describe adoption behaviors (Rogers 1983).

Furthermore, we must remember that all innovation is risky and fraught with difficulty. For instance, Adams and Chen (1981) estimate that approximately 75% of all innovations fail to survive in the long term. Thus, it is not surprising that individuals and organizations involved in managing change have engaged in a continuing search for more effective ways of implementing and maintaining innovations. However, even relatively recent attempts to improve the effectiveness of innovation efforts have met with criticism. For example, Fullan (1989, cited by MacDonald 1991) argues that, within education at least,

all the conscious strategies of innovation developed to date have failed to fully achieve desired goals.

I do not raise these issues to make language teaching professionals shy away from a diffusionist perspective. As Ron White (personal communication) notes, it is *crucial* to understand "the importance of continuous innovation as part of professional and organizational development, particularly as circumstances in the wider environment are constantly changing." Language teaching will benefit greatly if language teaching professionals develop their own *critically informed* tradition of innovation research and practice. This entails being aware of potential problems in diffusion research, borrowing ideas from disciplines that already possess such research traditions (education, management, medicine, anthropology, sociology, development planning, language planning, and urban planning), and gaining practical experience in solving innovation-related problems. Along these lines, Brindley and Hood (1991) suggest that teachers must *experience* innovations firsthand if they are to adopt and incorporate these changes into their pedagogical practice. This advice is relevant for all language teaching professionals, particularly program directors, who must reinvent themselves as change agents who know how to promote change. It is only by becoming familiar with both the practice and theory of innovation that participants develop a critical understanding of the relevant issues.